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SUBJECT: South China Pig Deaths Raise Safety Concerns

(U) This document is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

11. (SBU) Summary: An epidemic outbreak in pigs in rural Guangdong, caused by porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome virus (PRRSV), has killed several hundred pigs in Guangdong's Yunfu Prefecture and the county-level-city of Gaoyao since late April. The Prefectural Government excluded the possibility of a large scale outbreak; the virus has been in China since 1995 with isolated outbreaks. Measures have been taken to monitor and prevent the spread of the disease and the Government said the situation is under control. Public concern would have been minimized had the government at all levels been more transparent regarding the situation and the actions they had taken. Post has confirmed with both U.S. veterinarians and epidemiologists that this disease has not been associated with a risk to humans. End summary.

Only 300 dead pigs, not 80 per cent of the total

12. (SBU) Hong Kong media reported on May 7 that, in Yunfu's Silao Town in Guangdong Province, an large- epidemic outbreak killed 80 percent of the pigs in the area. The local Chinese government was criticized for providing little information about the outbreak. Chinese official media published articles claiming the original report exaggerated the number of dead pigs and provided more background about the epidemic situation and the Government's response. Chen Jinhai, Director-General of Yunfu Municipality's Foreign Affairs Office, told Consular staff to refer to official media for details.

13. (SBU) According to stories in newspapers published by the Nanfang Daily Group, which is under the direct control of the Guangdong CPC Committee, as well as in the independent New Express newspaper on May 7 and 8 respectively, the outbreak occurred on April 23. Yang Weixin, the Executive Chief of Silao Town, said 300 out of the total 10,000 pigs raised in Silao died in the outbreak. A local farmer named Zhang was quoted saying that the number of dead pigs was well below 80%. The number of dead pigs in Gaoyao City, neighboring Silao Town, is still uncertain.

PRRSV the culprit

14. (U) According to the Chinese media stories, the Guangdong Provincial Government and Yunfu Municipal Governments have sent experts to investigate the outbreak. On May 10, results of the government's testing of diseased pigs were released to confirm porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome virus (PRRSV) was the

cause of the deaths. The Guangdong Provincial Agricultural Bureau announced that the pigs died of "high pathogenic porcine blue ear" virus which later also led to bacteria infection. The "blue pig ear" was introduced to China from Europe and American in mid 1990s. The announcement also said the PRRS virus cannot spread from animals to people, encouraged people to report further outbreaks to the Agricultural Bureau, and noted that a vaccine has already passed official testing and will be available soon.

15. (U) The Yunfu Government is reported to have been disinfecting local sites where the dead pigs were reported, as well as local markets and butchery areas. It also delivered antibiotics to pig farms in Silao Town, where farmers were required to bury the dead pigs in deep pits far from water sources. The Government said it would strengthen the monitoring of local farms and markets to make sure all dead and sick pigs will be properly disposed of and not be sold. News reporters discovered some local pig farms empty of pigs but were told that the government had moved sick pigs from local farms to centralized areas for monitoring and disposal.

16. (U) The dead pigs were reported to show syndromes of high fever, tics, anorexia and red or dark blue ears before their deaths. Hong Kong media said many pigs also showed resistance to antibiotics. According to the New Express story, government officials believe the disease is caused by lax disease prevention measures in small pig farms. One local feeds seller named Li also said dead pigs were only found in small farms near fish ponds, while large farms did not have problems.

What is PRRSV?

17. (SBU) PRRSV first surfaced as a disease in the United States in 1987 in the U.S., but was not identified until 1991, and arrived in China in 1995. The virus, while described in various reports as the

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most widespread and economically important disease for the pork industry in the United States and China, has not received much publicity in the past. National Institute of Health studies note that most Chinese isolates are related to the North American strain but there are a few related to European isolates. Reports on the National Institutes of Health, Biosecurity Center, and U.S. Animal Experimental Research Station (Nimss) websites have concluded that PRRSV does not represent a danger to humans at this time. USG human and animal health experts in country both confirm that there is no known associated risk to humans.

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